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Chair: Mr. Bowler ..... (Malawi)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda Item 58: Questions relating to information (A/70/21 and A/70/220)

1. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of its thirty-seventh session (A/70/21), during which a total of 32 Member States and three observers had highlighted the integral role of the United Nations in global affairs. Speakers had also mentioned the Organization's constantly-expanding workload, and expressed their full support for the work of the Department of Public Information in promoting the Organization's activities through its continued campaigns on such key issues for the international community as the post-2015 development framework, decolonization, dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace, promoting the initiative for a world against violence and violent extremism, poverty eradication, climate change, and promoting multilingualism in the United Nations system.

2. Multilingualism entailed the use of all official United Nations languages across traditional and new media platforms, as it was essential for communicating the Organization's actions to the international community and was crucial to achieving accountability, transparency, ownership and sustainability. Several speakers had noted with concern that daily press releases were not issued in all official United Nations languages, making it difficult for stakeholders to follow the work of United Nations bodies in a timely fashion and fostering inaccessibility and a lack of transparency.

3. Acknowledging the need for multilingualism to become ubiquitous in the work of the United Nations, speakers had also pointed out the need for it to be accomplished in a cost-neutral manner using existing resources.

4. Participants had universally praised the work of United Nations information centres as the Organization's global voice and had emphasized their important role in disseminating information about its activities and enhancing its image, particularly in developing countries. Adequate financial resources should therefore be allocated to enable them to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. The Committee on Information had noted with appreciation the offer of the Government of the Republic of Korea to host a proposed United Nations information centre in that country.

5. The Department's commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the Organization's founding had been praised for offering an opportunity for the Organization to more comprehensively promote its work and raise awareness among international community about the many areas it covered, and for Member States to draw attention to the work of the United Nations, reflect on its record and assess the challenges ahead.

6. Participants had also lauded the work of the United Nations Academic Impact as a successful example of the Department's cost-effective global outreach for disseminating information about the Organization, particularly among youth, as well as its work for universities and research institutions around the world, enabling them to more closely align their work to the values, principles and goals of the United Nations and promote global citizenship education.

7. Other participants had voiced strong support for the Department's Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine. Several speakers had commended the work of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, noting that it had reflected the growing importance of strengthening the voices of youth as a way of combating violent extremism and that the Department could contribute to that process by promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and mutual respect in youth programmes.

8. Responding to comments and queries from Member States at the session, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Christina Gallach had emphasized the Department's commitment to multilingualism, as shown by its integration into the Department's overall planning and decision-making process to ensure maximum accessibility. She had stressed that both social media and traditional means of communication were integral to ensuring that all members of the international community could be aware of and participate in the Organization's work. She had also referred to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library's digitization of 300,000 documents, containing some 3 million pages, accessible online in all official United Nations languages, as well as the 100,000 documents digitized by the United Nations Library in Geneva. An estimated 17 million documents remained to be digitized.

9. **Ms. Gallach** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on Questions related to information (A/70/220), expressed the Department's appreciation for the strong support it had received from Member States. It was particularly proud of its relationship with the Committee on Information and its Bureau, who were dedicated to ensuring that the Department was equipped to reach as many people as possible and provide support and guidance for its numerous programmes and activities.

10. Participation and sense of ownership by Member States and the international community were vital to supporting the Organization's activity and transparency, and had been demonstrated on an unprecedented scale in the past year. The Department had also actively sought to make the Organization's global presence felt by following the Member States' lead, considering their priorities, planning and coordinating its communications, and working with a myriad partners to publicize its messages on key issues. Thus, the Department had ensured the United Nations' visibility in global discussions on topics ranging from sustainable development and peace and security to human rights and its seventieth anniversary. The latest session of the General Assembly was a truly historic moment, marking not only seven decades of the international convening of nations, but also the unanimous adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — an opportunity seized by Member States to tackle the many pressing issues entailed in creating a more equitable, prosperous and sustainable world. Deploying a full array of new and traditional media and further expanding its pool of outreach partners to successfully engage global audiences, the Department took full advantage of the spotlight placed on the United Nations to highlight the international community's priorities and the Organization's unique role in offering solutions to their shared challenges.

11. The Department had redoubled efforts to increase the Organization's global reach during the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda and the high-level week of the General Assembly by collaborating across languages and multimedia partners and with agencies, funds, programmes and offices, resulting in unprecedented impact and breaking visibility and engagement records in such areas as the number of accredited journalists and overall website traffic during the high-level period. Records had also been broken on social media; all language units had reported enormous spurts in their statistics. A specially created Chinese hashtag for #Action2015 had received 130 million views and more than 63,000 comments.

12. The United Nations continued to adapt and build on its strategies on all major social-media platforms, experimenting for example with a new account on Snapchat, an essential social-media outlet for interacting with young people in particular.

13. In the lead-up to the high-level period, the Department had spearheaded the 2015: Time for Global Action campaign to accelerate action on the Organization's priorities of sustainable development and climate change. During the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa in July and the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in September, the Department had deployed a full range of tools in multiple languages to ensure that the events reached the widest audience possible. That support included drafting press kits and press releases, organizing roundtables and press briefings, facilitating media accreditation, creating multimedia stories and posting social-media content and other digital products.

14. The Department had continued striving to make better strategic use of information centres and had organized live briefings on key United Nations issues via WebEx, a web-based video conferencing tool, to strengthen day-to-day coordination not only with Headquarters but also among the centres, and to support stronger global communication to the media on a variety of priority issues. Prior to the summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, senior United Nations officials and experts had briefed approximately 270 participants from all regions in English, French, Russian and Spanish. A similar outreach approach was being used in preparation for the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

15. Taking advantage of visits by high-ranking United Nations officials, information centres had reached out to regional partners to promote key messages by organizing town hall meetings focused on such issues as sustainable development and the rights of persons with disabilities and attended by civil

society, the academic community and United Nations Country Team representatives. However, the universal adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals had placed a great responsibility on the Department to raise awareness and inspire action over the next 15 years. The more widely the agenda was known, the more Governments and international organizations would be held accountable for its implementation.

16. A new communications strategy was being developed for the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals at the end of 2015 and the implementation of the latter in 2016 and beyond. The Department would continue to carry out its successful media outreach and public engagement campaigns not only at Headquarters, but also at local and regional levels by providing rich content and collaborating with its 63 information centres and regional commissions, peace operations and civil-society partners such as non-governmental organizations. Universities were also a key partner, and many of the over 1,000 member institutions of the United Nations Academic Impact initiative had actively promoted the Sustainable Development Goals through panel discussions, conferences and other public events.

17. Later in 2015, the Department would apply its strategic approach to its work on the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change during the lead-up period, the conference itself and the crucial work of explaining its outcome. The link between climate change and the sustainable development agenda would be highlighted throughout.

18. To celebrate its seventieth anniversary, the United Nations had launched the "Turn the World UN Blue" initiative, during which more than 350 monuments and landmarks had been illuminated in blue. That truly global event, which would have been impossible without the commitment, support and participation of nearly 85 Member States, had provided a very local and visual reminder of the role that the United Nations played in the lives of people around the world and a testimony of solidarity and connectivity — two words crucial to the Organization. The multilingual social-media campaign created around the hashtag #UNBlue had reached 290 million viewers on various platforms.

19. The Department, had mobilized United Nations information centres and regional commissions and offices to raise public awareness of the Organization's seventieth anniversary through numerous activities and media campaigns ranging from sports events and exhibitions to open houses and street festivals. Those myriad events, created in close partnership with Member States, had highlighted the Organization's work on development, peace and security, human rights and the current challenges it faced in building a better world.

20. The anniversary had also offered a timely opportunity to advance communications activities and outreach in many other areas. For example, the Department had created a new printed edition of the Charter in all six official languages, and the Library had prepared an online exhibit exploring 70 key documents that had shaped the United Nations and the world. In the latest issue of the *UN Chronicle*, eminent contributors such as Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and his three immediate predecessors had highlighted key moments, achievements, challenges and obstacles over the past 70 years.

21. The Department had also created original content for that anniversary, engaging the public with visually arresting short films about the Organization's history and daily work. A photo exhibition in the Headquarters Visitors Lobby captured key moments and personalities in the Organization's history. The Department was grateful to the Government of Oman for a generous contribution of $4.5 million towards digitizing and preserving the Organization's audiovisual archives. To that end, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, together with the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management and the United Nations Office at Geneva, had continued to make progress in digitizing important documents dated prior to 1993. Most Security Council documents had already been digitized, and work continued on General Assembly documents. However, much work remained, and the Department was raising the necessary funds to digitize its priceless collection and make it more accessible.

22. In the area of peace and security, the Department had promoted the September 2015 Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping and had worked with many troop- and police-contributing countries and their media to raise public awareness about the Summit's outcome.

23. Recently, on the fifteenth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, the Department had worked closely with

UN-Women and the Permanent Mission of Spain to draw media attention to the Council's open debate on the issue and the release of a global study on the resolution's implementation. The Department's multi-pronged campaign had resulted in extensive global reporting on women as peacemakers and peacebuilders. Its close collaboration with Member States from the Caribbean Community and the African Union on the United Nations Remember Slavery Programme continued to illustrate women's strong leadership role in the struggle for human rights and equality. Educational outreach on the Holocaust and genocide prevention had continued and a new publication in the Programme's discussion papers series was being finalized, as were preparations for an event marking *Kristallnacht* in November 2015.

24. In honour of Africa Week, the Library had also recently collaborated with the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the Economic Commission for Africa to make relevant services and content available to all Member States as part of its broader effort to continuously improve its services. Research facilities included up-to-the-minute political analysis, media sources and e-books, all of which were online and free for delegations to use. Professional information specialists were available to guide research, and a new one-stop service desk would respond to any query within an hour.

25. The Department had also been active in Organization-wide efforts to address the recent spurt in violence and tensions in the Middle East and to promote dialogue. It had disseminated the Secretary-General's video message to Israelis and Palestinians using multilingual news platforms and targeted outreach to journalists. For over 20 years, the Department had worked to develop Palestinian media capacity by organizing an annual training programme for young Palestinian journalists. More than 160 journalists had been trained thus far and the Department was helping them create an alumni association that could become a great networking resource for the United Nations and an effective partner for peace in the region.

26. In an effort to resolve region-specific issues, the Department had also recently brought together United Nations information centre staff from the Middle East-North Africa region for a meeting and training session organized by the Cairo centre, designed to explore the rapidly expanding possibilities of engaging new and primarily young audiences on United Nations issues via social media, improve networks and foster increased cooperation among Arabic-speaking centres for faster and more comprehensive delivery of United Nations information in Arabic and avoid duplication, and gradually cross-feed information to the United Nations Country Teams in the region while maintaining a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals.

27. The Department continued to seek innovative ways to bring its information to a wider multilingual audience. In partnership with United Nations Academic Impact member Shanghai International Studies University, it had published a Chinese-language edition of *Basic Facts about the United Nations*. A Russian-language edition had also been created by the information centre in Moscow for the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations and was made available on its website, while the Islamabad centre was diligently working on the first-ever Urdu version.

28. The United Nations Academic Impact initiative continued to strengthen the Organization's engagement with and outreach to academic and research communities and university students. For example, the second annual J. Michael Adams Lecture and Conversation Series to promote global citizenship would soon be held at United Nations Headquarters, and a conference was planned for early 2016 on unlearning intolerance and ending all forms of bigotry. The Department would also continue its series of conferences and presentations on ways in which research and technology could contribute to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

29. The Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, Ahmad Alhendawi, continued to emphasize the importance of addressing young people's development needs and rights. Together with the Office of the President of the General Assembly and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, his office, which was part of the Department, had organized a high-level General Assembly event in May, marking the twentieth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth and underscoring youth priorities in the post-2015 development agenda. He had also recently announced the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals, which would launch a virtual Youth Gateway, an innovative online platform serving as a centralized youth hub for awareness-raising and engagement.

30. Over the past few months, greater attention had been given to working with young people in conflict-stricken and post-conflict areas, and bolstering the voices of youth to combat extremism and promote a culture of mutual respect and tolerance. The Envoy's office had co-organized a Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in Amman, Jordan in August which had helped contribute to a shift in how young people were viewed. In the same spirit, the Envoy undertook missions to Nairobi in July to discuss the development of a national youth policy for Somalia, and to Palestine, the Philippines and Tunisia to meet with young people in conflict-stricken areas.

31. The Department had also engaged with youth in other ways. On the International Day of Peace in September 2015, a videoconference had offered more than 700 young people a platform to present their ideas and projects on building a culture of peace. Support for Model UN programmes had continued in different parts of the world, and the Department would conduct a Model UN workshop for students and teachers in November.

32. The Department also engaged United Nations staff through iSeek, the United Nations intranet website, which increasingly served as a powerful internal communication tool and had been migrated to an up-to-date and robust platform. Part of its continuous evolution, the new design met staff needs identified through surveys and focus groups and allowed remote and mobile-phone access.

33. The seventieth anniversary of the United Nations was a call to action for the Organization to continue to evolve in its mission. While the Department faced many challenges, its entire team was committed to empowering people through information to make a stronger United Nations and a better world. To that end, it had a range of dedicated partners, and no allies were more reliable than the Member States, whose national and international causes it sought to advance.

34. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) asked how the Department's training programmes such as the Reham Al-Farra Memorial Journalists' Fellowship Programme and the programme for Palestinian Journalists would be improved, and particularly if the Fellowship Programme would be extended, as it had received very good feedback from participating journalists the previous year. His delegation also expressed its appreciation for the United Nations Academic Impact initiative, particularly commending Ramu Damodaran for his leadership. However, while his country had a population of more than 80 million, the Director of its United Nations information centre held only a P-4 post, whereas the Director of a centre in a very small country in the region held a P-5. He wondered if that post would be upgraded to enable the Director in his country to work appropriately.

35. **Ms. Gallach** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the Reham Al-Farra Fellowship was an outstanding initiative that supported journalists around the world, particularly in areas where training was more complex and needs were greater. It provided life-changing opportunities to participants, and the Department was extremely proud of its impact. The Department wished to expand the Fellowship Programme as much as possible, but given its financial limitations, it had been forced to eliminate participants' stays in cities other than New York in order to include representatives of as many countries as possible.

36. The United Nations information centres had long since been established. While the teams on the ground were determined on the basis of information needs, resource availability also played a role. Any personnel increase was a very difficult balancing act that would involve either additional resources or downgrading other personnel. However, given the intensive engagement, commitment and imagination of personnel around the world regardless of their grade or length of service, the Department would be able to accomplish much with their energy and support.

37. **Mr. Plasai** (Thailand), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), recognized and supported the guidance and direction provided to the Department by Committee on Information, and encouraged that Committee to continue working closely with the Department and all stakeholders to strengthen connections between the general public and the United Nations through coherent and creative approaches.

38. ASEAN commended the Department for organizing events and activities to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations in partnership with Governments, academia and civil society. Given that development issues directly concerned the well-being and livelihoods of people everywhere, ASEAN appreciated the outreach and

communication efforts on various media platforms for the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. The Department should continue keeping the public abreast of major upcoming international conferences on development, such as the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, and disseminating information about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its follow-up process.

39. Representing a region rich in cultural and linguistic diversity, ASEAN fully understood the need for multilingualism, and supported its integration into the Organization's activities along with the Department's and relevant United Nations agencies' decision to use all the Organization's official languages with a view to overcoming the language barrier faced by a large portion of the global population and allowing those people to participate in discourse on important global issues.

40. ASEAN reaffirmed its full support for the shared undertaking of United Nations peacekeeping operations and emphasized their benefits, which entailed increased global visibility and a positive image for the Organization, and welcomed the Department's work towards enhancing public information about United Nations peacekeeping operations in partnership with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. The Department staff's field visits to a number of peacekeeping missions to provide informational support and training on communications and media campaign management constituted a notable collaboration.

41. Social media had the potential to significantly increase the Organization's reach and promote greater interaction with its audience, and particularly the global youth population. ASEAN noted with satisfaction the large increase in the cumulative statistics for United Nations social media accounts, which had risen from 40 million in May 2014 to more than 350 million in May 2015.

42. However, social media also posed a risk of misuse or abuse. Inaccurate reporting and distorted information could be used to fuel intolerance, violence and extremism. The United Nations should lead by example in tackling that issue to promote responsible public information. ASEAN encouraged the Department to continue supporting initiatives promoting peace, mutual respect and understanding, and interfaith dialogues, including the Culture of Peace, the Alliance of Civilizations and the ASEAN-initiated global movement of moderates to counter the spread of extremism, violence and hate speech. Nevertheless, there remained vulnerable communities which lacked access to advanced communication tools such as the Internet. Thus, the Organization must continue to use traditional media to reach out to such groups and prevent their being misled by extremist groups.

43. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that, as the host country of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and a Member State committed to the values of peace, human rights and development, Thailand had actively informed its public about the work of the United Nations and its global agenda. Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained a Thai-language website that provided information on its partnership with the United Nations on such issues as peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Users could also access information related to recent developments in such global processes as the post-2015 development agenda and climate-change negotiations.

44. To celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United Nations Association of Thailand had organized the "UNderstand" exhibition in 2014 and 2015 to provide a better understanding of the Organization and encourage Thai people and Thai youth in particular to participate actively in matters related to peace, security, and human rights and development, the three pillars of United Nations work.

45. **Mr. Proaño** (Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that public information activities should fully respect international law and the Charter of the United Nations, and should be geared to promoting peace, cooperation and solidarity among peoples. They should also contribute to universal well-being and sustainable development, including access to information and knowledge, by incorporating economic, social and environmental factors. Taking note of the reports of the Secretary-General (A/70/220) and of the Committee on Information (A/70/21), CELAC appreciated the efforts of the Department of Public Information to raise public awareness of the Organization's work, and underlined the key role of the Committee on Information in establishing a new, more

just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding.

46. In an evolving world, new methods were needed to ensure the distribution of information to all, without discrimination. While electronic communications were a fast, effective and interactive method of conveying information, the widening digital divide between developed and developing countries remained a matter of concern. The United Nations must therefore not neglect traditional media, which were the main sources of information for most developing countries. Furthermore, the Secretary-General and the Department should strengthen their support for United Nations information centres, which were essential for spreading the Organization's message.

47. Freedom of expression and of the press were vital to any democratic society and must be exercised responsibly, in line with the relevant national legislation and United Nations instruments. In that regard, CELAC highlighted its Special Declaration on Internet Governance processes adopted in January 2015, which reaffirmed the need for progress in building a regional and national Internet governance framework based on international law and the respect for human rights and the sovereignty of States — regardless of their level of development — as well as the right of all to privacy. The media and information and communications technologies (ICTs) should also be used in compliance with international legal frameworks. CELAC was concerned by violations of radio frequencies, which must be used in the public interest and in accordance with the principles of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. It rejected the use of ICTs in violation of international law, in particular when used to the detriment of any Member State and in contravention of the principles of State sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs.

48. As multilingualism was inherent to the existence of the United Nations, the Organization must disseminate information in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese and indigenous languages. It was therefore a matter of great concern that the issuance of press releases had not been expanded to all official languages, in full respect of the principle of parity of all six official languages. In that regard, CELAC welcomed General Assembly resolution A/69/96 A-B and encouraged Member States to adopt draft resolution B contained in document A/70/21, which called for the delivery of press releases in the six official languages by means of creative solutions, in a cost-neutral manner. Parity and equal respect for all the official languages must be achieved. Despite progress in that regard, the financial and human resources provided to the Department should be evenly distributed among all the languages; more remained to be done, including in the publication of the United Nations webpage and the use of social networks.

49. CELAC regretted that the Secretary-General's report (A/70/220) lacked statistics on the number of visits by language to the United Nations website and requested the Department to make those statistics available to Member States to help to inform their decisions on matters related to information and outreach activities. While the live webcasts of General Assembly and Security Council meetings in the six official languages were welcome, the Secretariat should strive to address the continued unavailability of information on the work of the main bodies of the Organization in all the official languages. CELAC expressed deep concern regarding the United Nations Web TV coverage incidents during the June 2015 session of the Special Committee on Decolonization and urged the Department of Public Information, the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management to take the necessary measures to avoid a repetition of such incidents and to ensure wide dissemination of information on decolonization as well as coverage of all sessions of the Special Committee, in line with resolution 69/106.

50. CELAC welcomed the efforts of the Group of Friends of Spanish at the United Nations and, sharing its concern regarding linguistic parity and the need for collaboration in the promotion of multilingualism, would continue to focus on the application of multilingualism in all the Organization's information activities. Although ICT platforms were developing more and more quickly, millions of people were still excluded from that process. Conveying the United Nations message using a combination of modern and traditional methods remained a major challenge. CELAC would continue to work towards that goal on the basis of full observance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

51. **Mr. Budhu** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM),

applauded the Department's continued efforts and initiatives to promote greater understanding of the principles that steered United Nations activities. CARICOM particularly appreciated the Department's outreach on development, human rights and international law, the maintenance of peace and security, climate change and the commemoration of various international days and decades.

52. In 2015, the United Nations had taken significant steps to consolidate the global development partnership by enhancing cooperation in the economic, social, environmental and cultural spheres. CARICOM noted with appreciation the Department's support and awareness-raising for several instrumental international conferences that year, including the Third International Conference on Financing for Development and the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda. The Department must make every effort to ensure that information on the Organization's ongoing work was readily available and accessible.

53. Additionally, CARICOM strongly encouraged the Department to support the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other United Nations agencies for the upcoming Conference of the Parties and to continue publicizing the urgent need for climate action and the States Members' role in that action through social media and the climate change website.

54. Inclusivity remained essential to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, worldviews or language, were kept updated and engaged in the process of realizing the Sustainable Development Goals. CARICOM emphasized the need to utilize all official United Nations languages appropriately within the framework of the Department's activities and strongly believed that equal working terms and resources should be offered for each of those languages. It also welcomed the progress achieved in the use of social media to advance the Department's outreach to young people across various platforms.

55. CARICOM reaffirmed its support for the work of the United Nations information centres. The centre serving the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean, located in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, continued to collaborate closely with a robust network of Government, civil society and media officials to reach the widest audience possible. Furthermore, CARICOM welcomed the recent appointment of the centre's new Director, Mr. Juan-Miguel Diez, reaffirming its support for the conduct of his work and reiterating its appreciation for the excellent service of the former Director, Mrs. Angelica Hunt.

56. Many of that centre's activities for 2015 had been developed within the framework of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To promote the latter, the centre had organized a WebEx briefing with the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning, Ms. Amina Mohammed, and had connected more than 130 participants from the media and civil society as well as Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. In July 2015, the centre had also coordinated the live web-streaming of the Secretary-General's address at the opening of the Caribbean Sustainable Development High-level Dialogue, which had also been a collaborative event between the United Nations and CARICOM.

57. CARICOM also praised the Department's awareness-raising on the history of the transatlantic slave trade, including its outstanding organization of activities to mark the annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, commemorated by 25 information centres.

58. The transatlantic slave trade had been the darkest chapter in human history and must not be forgotten. CARICOM was pleased that, in cooperation with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, "The Ark of Return," a permanent memorial to honour the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, had been unveiled at the United Nations Visitors' Plaza in New York in March 2015. The memorial should remind the international community never to repeat the mistakes of the past and should instil an obligation in the Organization to end all forms of slavery. The United Nations Information Centre for the Caribbean Area had participated in two video conferences commemorating that day. The current year's theme of "Women and Slavery" had also been commemorated with a number of activities.

59. CARICOM acknowledged with appreciation the Department's ongoing support for the communication and outreach activities of the United Nations Senior Coordinator for the Cholera Response in Haiti.

Similarly, the Department's support for the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) had been crucial to raising over $5 billion to support affected countries. Therefore, CARICOM encouraged continued international awareness-raising regarding United Nations efforts to eradicate cholera in Haiti and Ebola in Africa.

60. **Mr. Mminele** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed the Group's support for the Department's indispensable role in disseminating accurate, impartial, comprehensive and timely information to the public regarding the activities of the United Nations. It was important to strengthen continuously the cooperation between the Department and the Committee on Information in promoting the ideals and values of the United Nations. The Group welcomed the promotion through public awareness campaigns of the many important decisions taken, including on the post-2015 development agenda, peacekeeping and several other areas. It also welcomed the Department's efforts to mainstream multilingualism into all communication and information activities, which was essential in communicating the actions of the United Nations to the world and vital for the transparency, accountability, ownership and sustainability of those actions.

61. However, the Group continued be concerned at the continuing disparity in the use of official languages on the Organization's website and on daily press releases, and encouraged the Department to reinforce its efforts to narrow the gap amongst different official languages on United Nations websites in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and its mandate. The Group regretted the lack of statistics on the number of website visits by language in the Secretary-General's report (A/70/220) and urged the Department to provide that information to Member States, as it was a useful tool for decision-making on matters related to the dissemination of information and outreach activities.

62. The Group underlined the importance of the United Nations information centres in enhancing the Organization's public image, bearing in mind that the information transmitted through them had the strongest impact in mobilizing support in developing countries. The information transmitted through the centres should contain comprehensive, balanced, objective and equitable information in all official languages about the issues before the Organization. Furthermore, the Department should allocate adequate resources to ensure the effective functioning of the centres in developing countries and take into consideration the views of the host countries on relevant matters.

63. The Group further emphasized that the Department should maintain and improve its activities in areas of special interest to developing countries and countries with special needs. The Department's activities should bridge the existing gap between developing and developed countries in the crucial field of public information and communication. The Group also attached great importance to the continued use of traditional media, on which many people in the developing world still relied primarily, in disseminating information as a means of communication. It welcomed the efforts of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to digitize files and to make the guide to the United Nations available in all official languages.

64. **Mr. van den Akker** (Observer for the European Union), speaking on behalf of the European Union and its member States, said that his delegation welcomed the continued efforts of the Secretary-General to ensure an integrated approach to outreach activities on the priority issues on the Organization's agenda. That approach should be applied to the Organization's areas of focus to ensure that society as a whole took an interest in its work. The European Union was in favour of a bottom-up approach, giving room to stakeholders from NGOs, academia, foundations and public-private partnerships.

65. For a message to be clear, it must be appropriate, timely, audience-centred and responsive to feedback. Clearer strategic communication increased transparency. To be fully efficient, it must also be evaluated to avoid duplication of work in the different divisions of the United Nations. A system-wide strategic framework for information and communication was particularly important in view of the challenges the Department faced in building coherence, consistency and convergence in the many interrelated processes during 2015. All stakeholders must be engaged, notably through the use of appropriate media and languages of communication. The Department's efforts to date in that regard, using webcast and other media tools as well as harnessing the complementary efforts of the United Nations information centres around the world, were welcome and should be continued. Close collaboration between the Department and the Executive Office of the

Secretary-General was key, especially in the light of the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Paris, for which the European Union had high expectations. The selection in 2016 of a new Secretary-General would be innovative, with a stronger role for the General Assembly and more transparency and accountability, and the process would be another excellent opportunity to showcase the United Nations to a large audience. The international community was facing many cross-border challenges, including the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the public-diplomacy role of the United Nations was more crucial than ever in that regard. The use of social media was therefore vital, as it facilitated an interactive dialogue with interested and concerned global citizens, including young people.

66. Mainstreaming of multilingualism into the Secretariat's communication and information activities, within existing resources and on an equitable basis, was essential for the accountability, transparency, ownership and sustainability of the Organization's actions, and his delegation looked forward to assessing the impact of concrete measures taken and work still to be done in that area. The European Union welcomed the Department's dedicated thematic campaigns on the post-2015 development agenda and many other policy priorities at the United Nations. The European Year for Development (2015) placed focus on the role of the European Union in the world, including its cooperation with the United Nations, and the need for ongoing cooperation between the two multilateral bodies had been underlined by the Secretary-General. The Department's outreach efforts and the work of information centres were of great value for ensuring that all stakeholders, including civil society and NGOs, were kept informed and could participate. He also welcomed the Department's work in keeping the public informed of the United Nations response to crisis situations in specific countries and to issues such as peacekeeping, development, and the prevention of HIV/AIDS, malaria and yellow fever. Human rights issues should also be given priority on an ongoing basis. As always, the European Union and its member States were prepared to support the United Nations in its public diplomacy efforts.

67. **Ms. Rodríguez Pineda** (Guatemala), speaking on behalf of the Group of Friends of Spanish, said that the growing interest of Spanish-speaking peoples in the work of the United Nations had prompted the foundation of the Group, based on the shared conviction that strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and such a group would benefit the Organization's ideals, purposes and principles. The Group welcomed the Department's efforts to provide information on key issues to an audience that was increasingly global, informed and interested in learning more about the work of the United Nations, as well as to develop new content using new technologies while giving priority to traditional media.

68. In the light of the continued increase in traffic in all languages on the Organization's website — the main portal through which its work was reflected — the Group commended the Department for its efforts to improve the website's accessibility and design and to create new products, services and content in collaboration with other Departments. It was concerned, however, that parity among the six official languages was not always observed there; all new content for the website should respect the principle of multilingualism, in line with the Department's mandate from the General Assembly. That concern was even greater in view of the growing popularity of the website's Spanish-language portion, which, according to statistics for the period covered in the Secretary-General's report (A/70/220), had once again ranked second only to English in volume of traffic. Given that the purpose of the website was to promote the work of the Organization, the persistence of substantial differences in content by language was worrying because it affected the public's perception of the United Nations.

69. The principle of multilingualism must also apply on the social media platforms used by the Organization. Content must be created in each of the official languages, not translated. In the digital era, real-time information geared towards the interests of each region was important. The Group noted that the Secretary-General's report (A/70/220) did not contain statistics on the number of visits to the United Nations website or data disaggregated by language, and reiterated its hope for more statistics of that nature in future reports, which would help to establish valuable diagnoses transparently and to devise concrete actions.

70. The Group was encouraged by the fact that the draft resolution on questions relating to information (A/70/21, chap. IV), like General Assembly resolution

69/324, emphasized the Secretariat's responsibility to mainstream multilingualism in all its communication and information activities, within existing resources and on an equitable basis. That mandate encompassed the requirement for the issuance of daily press releases in Spanish as well as in the other official languages. The Group took note of the intention to provide additional resources under the draft budget for 2106-2017 to ensure that the Department had sufficient staff to carry out its mandate. The Department had made efforts to comply with the Assembly's request that it should deliver daily press releases in all six official languages by means of creative solutions and in a cost-neutral manner and the Group of Friends of Spanish stood ready to provide assistance in that regard. Resource constraints could not justify the unequal treatment of the six official languages; it was unacceptable for one language to be give preference to the detriment of others.

71. **Mr. Abdalla** (Sudan) said that the media played a key role in promoting dialogue and other United Nations core values, and in disseminating information on such modern challenges as climate change, conflict and sustainable development. With that in mind, increased collaborative efforts should be made to bridge the gap between developed and developing countries by ensuring fair, professional and objective media coverage of events in the developing world and preventing major players on the international political scene from imposing their agendas. Given that negative and irrational reporting had exacerbated crises in the past, it was now more crucial than ever to seek solutions to the world's problems in a spirit of tolerance, dialogue and respect for others. His delegation commended the work of the Department and called for greater coordination between international and regional media services.

72. **Mr. Alday González** (Mexico) said that Mexico recognized the efforts of the Department of Public Information, particularly its Spanish-language radio, television and News Centre staff, to do more with increasingly scarce resources. The Department's proactive efforts to incorporate new technologies and its entry into the social media sphere opened new avenues to build support for the Organization's activities. However, it must not lose sight of the fact that most of the world's population relied on traditional media for information on the United Nations. Concerned about the increasing digital divide between developed and developing countries, Mexico called on all stakeholders to help reduce it, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Equal access to new technologies could drive national prosperity and offer better economic opportunities to individuals.

73. Given the importance of parity among the six official languages in the Organization's media and communication products, more real-time information should be made available in Spanish, the second most commonly-spoken language in the world and in the host country, and the second most-used for webpage visits and social networks. As the world's most populous Spanish-speaking country, Mexico stood ready to help identify and implement solutions to enhance the efforts of the Group of Friends of Spanish, which had been working informally and effectively with the Department to address the lack of information available in Spanish.

74. On the Organization's seventieth anniversary, the Department of Public Information should strengthen coordination in the development of outreach plans and messages on the 2030 development agenda, climate issues and on the three review processes undertaken in 2015. It was also vital for the Department to participate, where relevant, in the planning and deployment of peacekeeping and special political missions. Such coordination was indispensable for raising awareness on new realities, successes and lessons learned and remaining challenges. Furthermore, to manage and put into context the expectations surrounding United Nations field presence, missions should have duly trained public information staff.

75. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the Committee on Information and the Department of Public Information were responsible for ensuring that the United Nations message of peace reached all corners of the world, especially at a time when conflicts and cross-border challenges such as extremism and terrorism were on the rise. The media had a significant impact on public opinion and were capable of not only reporting events but also influencing or even creating them. His delegation was concerned about certain biased media outlets that failed to respect journalistic standards, misrepresented facts to serve narrow political agendas and instigated terrorism and violence instead of promoting a culture of peace. The United Nations must take care to use only trusted, impartial, non-politicized information sources.

76. He commended the work of journalists who put their lives at risk to impartially report the facts, particularly in areas of terrorist activity, and denounced the targeting of such journalists, in particular the abominable actions of ISIL. His delegation rejected the description of terrorist groups as "armed resistance" by the spokesperson of the Secretary-General and other prominent United Nations representatives, including the description of the Al-Nusra Front, which was classified by the Security Council as a terrorist group linked to Al-Qaida, as "Syrian armed resistance".

77. The special information programme on the question of Palestine must be strengthened, given Israel's ongoing human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the targeting of journalists and peace activists, the apartheid wall, the desecration and destruction of Islamic and Christian holy sites and increasing settlement activity and settler violence. The Department of Public Information must also achieve parity among the official languages of the United Nations and remedy the deficiencies of the Arabic-language website. In addition, the Department could play an important role in encouraging dialogue and building understanding among cultures and peoples.

78. His delegation reaffirmed that freedom of expression was a universal right that should never be used to attack the beliefs, holy sites or heritage of others. All States should support the work of the Department to promote the message of the United Nations and tackle pressing global issues such as ending all forms of occupation, combating terrorism and promoting sustainable development.

79. **Ms. Cuauro Casanova** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) welcomed the Department's efforts to increase the visibility of the Organization's work in its three pillars, and in particular, the promotion of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, to which her country attached great importance. She commended the Department's use of ICTs to disseminate the values and cultures of indigenous peoples and people of African descent, which helped to inform domestic policy to ensure the political, economic and social inclusion of those populations. Her delegation also recognized the Department's outreach on the Organization's coordinating role in the fight against cholera and the Ebola outbreak; such campaigns were important opportunities to educate the international community on the dangers of those epidemics and the need to find preventive measures and eradication policies.

80. Decolonization was of particular importance to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, which rejected the maintenance of colonial situations and foreign occupation since they affected peace and security and human rights. As a firm believer in the inalienable right to self-determination of peoples subjected to colonial domination or foreign occupation, her country welcomed the Department's organization of the upcoming International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. Such activities were significant because they were forums open to information that affirmed the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people as well as the Organization's commitment to a peaceful political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Venezuelan Government reiterated its support for the existence of a free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine, living in peace with neighbouring countries, within secure, pre-1967 international borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. She called on Israel to end the military occupation of the Palestinian Territories and its construction of settlements on Palestinian lands, in compliance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967).

81. The activities conducted in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations not only disseminated information on the latter's peacekeeping missions and on current situations and needs, but also honoured the commendable work of the peacekeepers. Her country praised their professionalism and commitment to maintaining international peace and security, with impartiality and without the use of force, except in cases of legitimate defence.

82. With the historic adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, her delegation considered bridging the digital divide and capacity-building particularly important to ensuring that each country had the requisite technical resources and skilled personnel. It therefore encouraged the adoption of measures to democratize the use of ICTs for the benefit of all, especially developing countries. However, her delegation wished to express its concern about the inappropriate use of ICTs for the purpose of interfering in the domestic affairs of States, destabilizing those States and violating the human rights of their citizens, particularly the right to privacy. Such actions contravened the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. ICTs should be used for the promotion of peace, sustainable development, cooperation and human rights.

83. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela supported the balanced use of the six official languages of the Organization with a view to eliminating the disparity between English and the five other languages. Spreading the message of the United Nations in the six official languages would bolster its work; her delegation therefore welcomed the Department's efforts in that regard on the official website. While progress had been made in creating alternative media, much remained to be done in order to achieve a more inclusive and democratic information society. Large media corporations continued to play a dominant role, hindering the dissemination of objective information. In that context, her delegation rejected the presentation of discriminatory and distorted information on events occurring in developing countries. It also rejected the defamatory use of the media for private interests and unethical purposes that were contrary to the responsible exercise of freedom of expression and opinion. Her delegation remained willing to work constructively towards the fulfilment of the mandate of the Committee on Information and urged the Department to continue improving its dissemination of the activities of, and the outcomes achieved by, the United Nations.

84. **Mr. Wehbi** (Lebanon) said that the Department, having recently adopted new social media strategies to keep pace with the modern world of communications, should continue to strengthen its partnerships with civil society, academia and the United Nations system and combine new and traditional media so as to reach as wide an audience as possible and ensure equitable access to information. While his delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to improve the United Nations website, increase timeliness of publications and gain more social media followers, it underlined that in view of their key role in building institutional memory, United Nations publications should be provided in all six official languages.

85. His delegation commended the work of the special information programme on the question of Palestine, which served to highlight Israeli oppression and draw attention to the pressing need to relaunch the peace process in the Middle East and end Israel's occupation of the State of Palestine. He stressed the need for clear, transparent communication between the United Nations and all States concerned and called for sufficient financial and human capacity to be provided to the United Nations information centre in Beirut, which maintained continuous communication with Lebanese and other Arab media to ensure effective coverage of the situation and challenges in the Middle East.

86. **Ms. Salem** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation appreciated the efforts of the Department to implement many important information programmes, in particular the special information programme on the question of Palestine, which was instrumental in raising international awareness of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as part of efforts to reach a just and lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

87. She further commended the Department, especially its Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section, for organizing the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East; for updating the permanent exhibit on the question of Palestine at United Nations Headquarters; and for its activities in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the current International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Department provided valuable assistance to Palestinian broadcasters and journalists through its annual training programme. Her delegation regretted that a highly qualified Palestinian from the Gaza Strip had been unable to participate because of the ongoing Israeli blockade there, which isolated Palestinians and deprived them of educational and developmental opportunities.

88. Regrettably, Israeli forces and settlers continued to target Palestinian and foreign journalists and media outlets systematically in a bid to prevent them from reporting on Israel's illegal practices. During the military aggression in Gaza in 2014, at least 17 journalists had been killed in Israeli airstrikes, in gross breach of international humanitarian law. Cases abounded of arrests, detentions and use of excessive force against journalists covering peaceful civilian demonstrations: in September 2015, two Agence France-Presse journalists covering a demonstration near Nablus, both wearing body armour clearly marked "Press", had been assaulted and had had their equipment seized and destroyed by Israeli soldiers; in October alone, at least 39 violations against journalists had been reported. The Palestinian leadership utterly rejected such violations and reaffirmed its commitment to

upholding international law and international humanitarian law with regard to journalists. Her delegation therefore reiterated its call to the Committee and relevant international organizations to step up their efforts to protect Palestinian and foreign journalists and to demand a halt to Israel's brazen flouting of General Assembly resolution 68/163 and Security Council resolution 2222 (2015). In previous statements to the Committee on Information, Palestine had emphasized the importance of the organization and promotion by the Department of fact-finding news missions for journalists in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as mandated by the General Assembly. Her delegation hoped that those activities would be carried out, with sufficient funding and staff, as early as possible.

89. Press freedom, telecommunications and information technology played a vital role in the development process. Israeli control and restriction of the communications sector in Palestine, including the radio-frequency spectrum allocated to it, denied the right of direct access to communications and broadcasting services and information technology. The Palestinian Government, with the support of the international community, was nevertheless making serious efforts to strengthen State institutions by promoting freedom of expression and building ICT networks to overcome the geographical and physical impediments to normal life and development imposed by the occupying Power. Her Government remained committed to pursuing peaceful and legal efforts to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; to ensure justice and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to freedom and independence in their State of Palestine on the basis of 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital; and the admission of the State of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations, to take its rightful place among the community of nations.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.